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FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000114

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PROXY POLITICS AT PLAY IN CHIANG MAI MAYORAL RACE

REF: A. A) BANGKOK 2994 - TRIBUNAL DISSOLVES THAI RAK THAI, STRIPS EXECUTIVES OF POLITICAL RIGHTS

[1](#)B. B) (06)CHIANG MAI 60 - ATTACK ON DEMOCRAT PARTY RALLY ESCALATES VIOLENC

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CLASSIFIED BY: Beatrice Camp, Consul General, Chiang Mai, Dept.
of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Although seven candidates are on the ballot for Chiang Mai's mayoral election on Sunday, the ostensibly non-partisan race is boiling down to how well Thai Rak Thai (TRT) proxies will do against opposition from the military and other anti-Thaksin elements. The outcome and control of City Hall are likely to influence future parliamentary races in the district and could signal how capable the Council for National Security (CNS) will be in organizing votes for the constitutional referendum and MP elections. Summary

[1](#)2. (C) With eight months left in his term, Chiang Mai Mayor Boonlert Buranupakorn resigned May 4 and called a new election, surprising and getting a jump on his opponents. In addition to being the first to blanket the town with his image, Boonlert started with high name recognition and the advantageous draw of the number "1" position on the ballot. As the incumbent and member of a large and well-heeled business and political family, Boonlert has built up political capital through targeted use of municipal funds during his six years in office. However, his identification with the Thai Rak Thai party through his brother Pakorn -- former mayor, former MP and one of the 111 banned TRT executive board members (ref a) -- puts him beyond the pale for the military. CNS chairman Gen Sonthi Boonyaratklin reportedly spread the word during a June 9 visit to Chiang Mai that Boonlert is not the right candidate.

--- One Rival Down ---

[1](#)3. (C) Boonlert gained additional traction when the TRT-era Provincial Election Commission disqualified his leading rival, Duantemduang Na Chiengmai. The national Election Commission on June 20 denied her appeal of the disqualification on residency issues. While this ended Duantemduang's race for mayor, she is expected to compete for MP on the Democrat ticket. (historical digression: In the complex chronicle of Chiang Mai politics, this incident will likely be an interesting footnote: Duantemduang lost in the Feb. 2005 parliamentary election to Boonlert's brother Pakorn while her mother was defeated in the same election by another TRT candidate. Her father serves as the elected head of the Provincial Administrative Organization. Although deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and TRT are now categorized as "old power", once upon a time they were seen as the upstarts challenging the old families of the region, including the Na Chiengmai descendants of the former ruling princes.)

--- All in the Family ---

[1](#)4. (C) Former TRT MP Pakorn Buranupakorn, whose family is already represented in the race by brother Boonlert, has yet another proxy in the form of his wife, Yawaret Kanchanakul. Yawaret's role reportedly is to be available to substitute for her brother-in-law if anything happens to disqualify him and at the same time to prepare her to stand in for her banned husband

in a future MP election.

15. (C) Yawaret is one of four lesser known names recognized by all as nominees for the "real" candidates, ready to step in if needed. With Duantemduang now out of the picture, Boonlert, former deputy mayor Pornchai Chitnawasathian and wealthy businessman Udom Suwitsakdanon remain as the three serious contenders. Pornchai, a young businessman with hotel interests, broke with his former mentor Boonlert in recent months and appears to be the choice of the military. Udom, a former Senator, is the richest of the bunch as the self-made owner of the Nim See Seng transport company and a money-lending business. All three candidates have spent lavishly, covering the town with signboards, posters, banners, leaflets, and car caravans; all three are expected to use creative accounting to show campaign costs within the legal limit.

16. (SBU) In addition to the successful challenge to Duantemduang's residency qualifications, Boonlert's camp also filed complaints against his other two viable opponents. These cases, against Pornchai for false statement of educational qualifications and Udom for making illegal promises to voters, are still pending with the local election commission.

--- Friends and Foes ---

17. (C) With Boonlert and Pakorn's combined tenure in City Hall spanning nine years, the Buranupakorn family has had time to consolidate both its popular base and its business interests. (Boonlert owns the new Sofitel hotel; another brother owns the Empress Hotel.) In the course of this, however, they have alienated other political groups, further aggravated after

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Pakorn instigated an attack on a Democrat party rally before the April 2006 election (ref b). The family also earned the animosity of the Crown Prince over a decade ago, thanks to their sister's one-time connection with the now-exiled former consort of the prince.

18. (C) With senior military officers reportedly providing hints to subordinates on how to cast a proper vote, the military appears to be waging a proxy war against Boonlert. Duantemduang, who holds the rank of captain in the army, was initially the soldiers' choice because of her previous campaign against Pakorn and the current friendly ties between the CNS and the Democrat Party. As her disqualification looked increasingly likely, however, Pornchai became the military's best bet.

19. (C) Comment. Victory in Sunday's municipal voting will not only determine who controls Thailand's second most important city but also impact local MP races in the next national elections. The military would like to block "old-power" proxies from gaining this important piece of northern turf; their success or failure on Sunday may suggest how far the CNS has to go in mobilizing support outside of Bangkok for the draft constitution and parliamentary candidates.

CAMP